

Last Star 133

Star XXXIX ~ By the Seaside ~ Part VI

When the sun was about to set, Avi returned to get dry and put on a warm hoodie before it got cold. Together with Luna and her parents, they lay on the sunbeds one last time, to silently watch the closest star disappear behind the horizon. Avi intertwined her fingers with Luna's, and Nicolas also held Charlotte's hand before the dusk came.

"It's so beautiful." - Luna said to Avi. - "I would like to experience it with you every day."

Avi smiled at her. - "Why not? When we finish our journey, we can find a nice place to build a cozy house and reminisce about our moments together."

[I like it, too!] - Eva exclaimed. - [It was so pretty! Can we come back here tomorrow?]

"Remember that sun sets everywhere, Eva..." - Avi said. - "...but it's still a nice idea. I would like to end our next days like this, too."

"End?" - Luna replied. - "The fun is just starting. The welcome party should already be starting."

[Party!] - Eva shouted, overjoyed.

Avi giggled. - "I didn't forget. Please forgive me for my poor choice of words."

Charlotte and Nicolas got up, still holding each other's hands, and Charlotte asked. - "I assume you would like to have some time just for yourselves before the main event?"

Avi wasn't sure, so Nicolas added. - "We're going to have a little date, so I thought you would like to do the same."

Luna smiled at Avi. - "It could be nice."

Avi nodded shyly.

"Oh, I see you agree. Have a good evening!" - Nicolas said before they were going to leave.

"Likewise!" - Luna replied, waving goodbye and soon was alone with Avi. They walked across the middle of the beach to tents and booths, then disappeared between them.

Under a variety of colorful, patterned cloth roofs, there were mostly shops with souvenirs and snacks. However, if one took a closer look, there were also a few larger tents offering entertainment in the form of competitions and games. Right from the beginning, Avi didn't want to skip any of the attractions and pulled Luna's hand almost to every stall.

“Can we try it?” - Avi asked and pointed at sticks with caramelized fruits.

“It depends. There are many more booths, so you have to plan accordingly and decide if you'll have room for more food later.” - Luna warned.

“Mmm.” - Avi considered her options. - “I would like two, then.” - She pointed at a stick with slices in the shape of stars, and another with slices in the shape of a crescent moon. After receiving them, she gave the last one to Luna and continued spying. - “Ooo! Look!” - She pointed at a group of children who were trying to catch fish at the fountain.

“Do you plan to collect some new species for our aquarium?” - Luna asked.

“No! Look at their masks! I want one, too! Do you think they sell them anywhere!?” - Avi asked.

“The shop is right behind the crowd to our left.” - Luna informed.

Avi hurried there, pulling Luna behind her, then carefully squeezed through the beachgoers. - “Excuse me... excuse me... uff...” - Her eyes were shining with joy once she noticed the stall with not only masks, but also matching ponchos. The wooden faces of many horned beasts and scaly dragons decorated mannequin heads, and below them, there were cloths with frills, stripes of leather, and ribbons.

“Ooo...” - Avi moved her fingers to her mouth and approached the display, almost touching it with her face.

"I'll take this set!" - Luna announced without reflecting too long.

Soon, a radiant smile could be seen beneath Luna's white rabbit mask with red detailing and long ears. -
"How does it look?" - She asked before turning around.

Avi clapped her hands in glee. - "Cute!" - She checked Luna's poncho, noticing it had a stripe of jumping bunnies at its edge, and below it were tangled threads.

"Your turn! Go ahead, pick something!" - Luna encouraged.

"I still can't figure out what." - Avi said as she checked mask after mask.

"What masks do you like the most?" - Luna asked.

"The dragon!" - She pointed at a green mask - "And these three!" - then pointed at an intimidating, red-black mask with horns, at a mask whose colors swirled like a galaxy, and a pink mask adorned with artificial flowers.

"Well, well... that's quite a collection." - Luna stated. - "Will we narrow your choices a bit?"

"Hm." - Avi thought for a moment. - "Which one do you like the most?"

Luna pointed at another mask, which wasn't Avi's choice. It had a silly expression and comically long nose. - "I think this one suits you most."

Avi pouted. - "Haha! Very funny."

Luna giggled. - "Okay, okay, don't be mad!" - She finally pointed at the red-black mask. - "I like this one, its fierce expression gives it a unique charm... and I also think you could use it to scare your parents."

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Avi snatched the mask with both hands, smiling. - "I will take it!"

When she put it on and dressed in a poncho, Avi raised her arms, pretending to attack Luna with claws. - "Rawr! I'm a night reaper who guards the gate between words! Pay your toll or I'll abduct you!"

Luna giggled. - "You're cute, even as a monster. I think I will let you kidnap me."

Avi raised her mask. - "Uhm, okay, but you still need to pay."

"Let me guess. In sweets?" - Luna asked.

[Yes! More sweets!] - Eva exclaimed.

Avi giggled. - “Okay, Eva. You choose this time.”

[Yay!] - Eva added, overjoyed. - [There! I like the smell!]

Avi was carrying a small box with balls made out of ground nuts covered in chocolate and coconut shavings. She picked them with a toothpick and bit off half, and shared the other half with Luna, so they could taste everything.

They watched some performers who were juggling and swallowing flames and a display of parrots, then participated in a ring-throwing contest, where Luna won a fluorescent gem pendant with a wave-like shape inside for Avi.

Holding each other's hands, they moved closer to the ocean, where there was an exhibition of sand sculptures. Luna decided to participate too, and with a snap of her fingers, she moved the wet sand and formed a shape closely resembling Avi in a dress, sitting on a rock and extending her hand to the stars. For participation, she received a small bottle with rainbow sand and a miniature octopus inside.

Afterwards, they finally arrived at the spot where the main event was supposed to take place. Around the wooden logs, the resort staff moved benches and lugged heavy crates with decorations and

equipment. Nicolas and Charlotte were already sitting and spending their time gazing at the dark, night sky.

Avi smiled maliciously. - "Time for the night reaper's attack!" - She put on her mask and began to sneak.

Luna rolled her eyes, following.

When Avi was next to her parent, undetected, she roared from behind their backs. - "Rawr!" - Then jumped right in front of Charlotte, startling her so much that she immediately scolded her.

"All you ever think about are stupid jokes!" - Charlotte said, irritated.

Nicolas laughed, but Charlotte looked at him angrily. It was enough for Nicolas to fake a stern face and add in a serious voice. - "Avi, you're already an adult. Act your age."

"Bores." - Avi complained.

"Avi!" - Charlotte warned.

"Fine, fine. I'm sorry." - Avi uttered in a meek voice.

Nicolas could figure out that Charlotte was going to lecture Avi, so once he noticed Luna, he quickly tried to change the topic. - "Nice outfits, where did you get them?"

"There is a shop in an alley left to the entrance." - Luna explained. - "Avi wanted to show off, please forgive her these antics."

"Hey! You're supposed to be on my side!" - Avi protested.

"I admit, she chose a poor moment." - Nicolas said.

"Poor is an understatement." - Charlotte added.

"Ohh, let it go! I said sorry!" - Avi argued.

"Eh." - Charlotte sighed. - "You don't have any remorse, do you? At least you came here in a good mood, so your date had to go well, and that makes me happier."

"It was amazing!" - Avi exclaimed. - "We were..." - She shortly, but enthusiastically began describing everything, and her parents listened with a smile, at least until other guests were occupying all the benches next to them. It was possible to hear the sounds of drums and tribal songs, and many dancers were wildly jumping around the wooden logs in the center, which indicated that the spectacle was about to start.

“Lasha!” - Could be heard from the speakers. The majority of present tourists replied with the same greeting. A female voice continued. - “Fourteen new souls joined our family today, and that's why we're here – to give them a warm welcome!”

A loud cheer from the crowd echoed across the beach, and in the meantime, the resort workers were handing cups of warm tea to everyone.

“By our ancestors' tradition, let us honor their will and raise a toast to the living!” - The woman announced. - “Let us revel and rejoice in all they built over generations, and in what they shed blood for. Let them hear our laughter and joy. Let them know their children live in prosperity and happiness!”

Everyone raised their cups, and the employees doused the wood in gasoline, then ignited it. Loud cheers continued, accompanied by the sound of toasts. Avi and her companions joined the celebration, which didn't stop even when the musicians began to rhythmically hit the drums.

A tall flame was dancing in the wind, becoming more intense as the melody progressed. All the dancers shouted - “Ayayaya-ya!” - and took out some white powder from their bags, then tossed it into the fire. It erupted like an orange pillar, and flaming birds with long tails began flying out of it, circling the guests and fading away shortly later.

Avi's mouth opened wide, and she put her cup aside. - “Luna... life and the world. They're both incredible.” - She uttered, captivated.

The flame erupted again, turning into the shape of an old man with a war bonnet made of long feathers. The sound of drums was replaced by ukulele, and he began to hum an optimistic, tribal song.

The spectacle was at its peak, uninterrupted. Only occasionally, the resort employees approached guests asking if they would like a tea refill. The flame shifted shapes into new music bands and mammals that rested at their feet, or in fish that circled it. At one point, when the song resembled a war cry, a long sea serpent even appeared and coiled around the smoke. Eventually, it returned to the flame, which no longer was changing shapes, and the dancer let out the last loud cry. A moment later, some guests began returning to their hotel rooms.

“Oh. Is it already over?” - Avi asked, disappointed.

“It's just the beginning.” - Luna informed. - “The welcome party will continue for the next few days. They're offering different attractions each day. For example, there is a treasure hunt late in the afternoon.”

Avi's eyes were sparkling. - “Really!?”

“What reason would I have to mess with you?” - Luna giggled.

Charlotte smiled. - “It was a good day, but I think it's time we head back to the hotel. I would like to remind you that you wanted to go scuba-diving tomorrow.”

Avi looked at the tents. It was clear that the shopkeepers were packing up their stuff and leaving. Only a few guests decided to stay and talk next to the fire, drinking. She was still sad it was over, but she quietly agreed. “Yeah, let's go.”

After getting their beach equipment, Avi and her companions soon returned to their rooms, where another, last 'greeting' surprise waited for them.

[Gifts!] - Eva exclaimed when she noticed four parcels with ribbons and a bottle of melon rum.

"Oh. That's so kind of them." - Charlotte commented.

"Heh. To think I was sure the party would be the last excitement for today." - Nicolas added. - "Well, girls. Do you want to open them?"

Avi leaped to the table and hurried everyone. - "Luna, which one first!?"

"Let's leave the biggest one for the end." - Luna suggested.

Avi agreed and removed the ribbon from the smallest, yellow parcel, revealing a box of sixteen jellies in tropical icing. Her eyes quickly began to beg Charlotte to let them have one today.

Charlotte gave in. - "Fine, but leave some for tomorrow."

The second gift was a set of tanning oils, and the third was four tropical shirts, with jungle and ocean-themed patterns. The last parcel held a set of wine glasses and rocks glasses, decorated with fiery animal shapes that they could see during the celebration.

“It'll be something to remember.” - Nicolas added, contented, then yawned, fatigued. He rested in the chair, looking at his daughter, who was happily examining gifts.

It had been a long day.